

**Bible Study**  
**Sixth Sunday after Easter, Year A**  
**May 21, 2017**

**[RCL] Acts 17:22-31; Psalm 66:7-18; 1 Peter 3:13-22; John 14:15-21**

**Acts 17:22-31**

In this passage, we see Paul addressing an audience almost exclusively made up of Gentiles in a Greek setting where Christianity is foreign, the concept of a monotheistic God is laughable and the idea of resurrection downright ridiculous. Paul is speaking a foreign concept to an audience that is curious, yet skeptical.

Aren't we all somewhat skeptical? This resurrection story we so joyously celebrate in Eastertide can be a hard one to fully accept without some critical thought and questions. What is it about this resurrection story that so captures us?

When I read this passage, I see Paul describing a miraculous and deeply mysterious deity, but what is perhaps most striking, for us and for the Gentiles of Paul's audience, is how personal and intimate this God of ours truly is. This is a God "in whom we live and move and have our being", a God that views us and loves us as God's "offspring", God's children. This is a God with whom we have a deeply intimate relationship and connection; not an object cast in gold or an untouchable, unreachable deity off in a separate realm. We belong to and are a part of God. Paul is not just proclaiming resurrection of the body, Paul is proclaiming that we are children of God, in whom all things are possible.

- Why might this notion of a personal God be so scandalous or hard to believe?
- How do you understand the resurrection as it relates to your personal relationship with God?
- How is God working on resurrection in your life this Easter season?

**Psalm 66:7-18**

Psalm 66 is considered a song of thanksgiving. In this passage, terrible things have happened to the speaker of the song, but they have survived and are praising God for having helped them through the trials. This Psalm recalls what God has done for the community (Ps 7-12) and what God has done specifically for the speaker of the Psalm (Ps 66:13-18). In other words, this Psalm tells a story about God's action and the personal ways in which God has helped others and the individual speaking.

As I raise my children, this Psalm represents the kinds of stories I tell them in order to help them understand what it means to have faith. I explain how God has been revealed to me and how I have personally experienced God alive in my local church and in community. I share how God has been active in my life as I have dealt with hardship. This Psalm represents a parent's story about their faith to their children and a grandparent's story to their children and grandchildren. It represents the stories we tell about our faith journey with God in community; these stories are passed down from generation to generation.

- How do you share your faith with younger generations?
- How do you think your faith story could help those younger generations understand their own faith journey? How has an elder's faith story shaped your faith journey?
- Where in our liturgy and worship do you see us singing this song of thanksgiving and sharing how God is alive in our community?

### **1 Peter 3:13-22**

Peter is speaking to a community of Christians who are terribly afraid because they live in a world where the threat of being murdered for their belief in Jesus as the Messiah constantly hangs over their heads. This passage can feel hard to relate to as many of us do not experience the constant threat of being attacked or killed by the governing authorities of this country for practicing our Christian faith.

In this passage, Peter seeks to assure the imperiled community and convince them that this faith is worth the threat of persecution and death. He appeals to the concept of baptism in order to make his point. Remember your faith, he seems to say, as he speaks on the meaning of the initiation into faith by the waters of baptism. This baptism “now saves you-- not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience.”

Today, when we remember our Baptismal Covenant we are asked to remember that we have promised to serve that of Christ in all persons, and respect the human dignity of every human being. While we may not be persecuted as Christians in this country and context, there are many who are being persecuted for their faith (Christian or otherwise) around the world and even in our own communities. How can we “appeal to God for a good conscience” by practicing our Baptismal Covenant and helping those who are being persecuted today?

- How can we practice the call of our Baptismal Covenant in our current contexts and communities?
- How is God calling you specifically to live into your Baptismal Covenant in this season of your life; in this year, month, week, day?
- What prayers, practices or disciplines help to anchor you in your Baptismal Covenant?

### **John 14:15-21**

This passage in John begins and ends with love. In between these bookends is an explanation of the relationships of the Holy Trinity. Jesus expresses that the commandment of love he has asked believers to keep is not something that will have to be done alone. In fact, we are intertwined and intimately connected to God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit as believers and are, ultimately, never alone. Our being, our essence, is part of God, which is part of Jesus, which is part of the Holy Spirit. Jesus emphasizes that these three persons of the Trinity are connected and interwoven. He expresses that we as believers do not only have access to these persons of God, we are also part of them, intertwined and deeply connected with them.

This passage articulates how living in faith means to live in Holy Community. Our model for God is a community of interwoven and interconnected parts which are bound up in and made from love. This focus emphasizes how our faith should be lived out and understood in relationship with one another. If

our model for God is expressed in three persons, representing what it means to be in communion with others, then we ought to work out and express our faith in communion as well. Love should also be the foundation on which all communion and faith is built.

- How do you live out your faith in communion/community?
- Are there ways in which you have not been able to live out your faith in community? How so?
- What do you like about this idea of faith lived out in community? What about this makes you feel uncomfortable or presents difficulty for you?

*Erin received her M.Div. from Earlham School of Religion and is receiving her Diploma of Anglican Studies at Bexley Seabury Seminary Federation. She is a candidate for ordination to the priesthood in the Episcopal Diocese of Indianapolis and currently serves as the Director of Discipleship at Good Samaritan Episcopal Church, an Episcopal Church plant in Brownsburg, Indiana. Erin will begin her first call in ordained ministry as the Pathways Priest for the Diocese of Indianapolis in June 2017, working on stewardship vitality and sustainability practices with four congregations in the diocese. She lives at home in downtown Indy with her husband and two boys.*

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